Prophecy of "Guilt" – Guest Post by Caryll Houselander

The following is an excerpt from Guilt (1951) by Caryll Houselander, author of A Rocking Horse Catholic *and* Reed of God *and other mystic and meditative Catholic books. This excerpt is from a chapter on "Mechanisms of Escape" and seems so timely I need not add more introduction. You can read the entire text of Guilt for yourself at Archive.org.*

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>
> CARYLL HOUSELANDER

Of all the attempts to escape personal responsibility for the suffering of the world and for individual guilt, none is so dangerous as the loss of their own individuality which countless people seek by identifying themselves with a group. One of the most persistent miseries that sin has imposed upon men is a sense of personal insufficiency. This has become more than ever acute in our own days, because of the huge tidal waves of fear that are sweeping through the world, filling the individual with dread because of his helplessness in the face of gathering disaster.

His plight is more terrible because in his flight from guilt he has lost sight of, or perhaps never seen, how to save himself, and with himself his fellow men, from what he dreads. Because he is afraid to look into his own soul, lit up by the searching beam of the Uncreated Light, he does not realize that the enemy is within himself. Only in himself can he come to grips with the evil which threatens to destroy humanity. He is afraid to look inwards, and so he is aware of little but that which is outside of himself. He is aware that the threatening tide of evil is always gathering strength, but not that its relentless and seemingly uncontrollable force is streaming out of his own heart.

Moreover, that which he refuses to recognize in himself, he projects onto others, whom he makes his scapegoats. Everyone who fails to realize and to come face to face with the enemy in himself will always seek and always find an enemy outside of himself.

Most people try to banish the dark side of their nature and of their individual psyche, to force it out of their consciousness into the unconscious. We have already seen how diverse are the ways they use, ranging from scrupulosity to crime.

Jung calls this dark side, which is part of every one of us, "the Shadow." It is the evil in man and his proneness to evil, the persistent downward lurch in every one of us, the potential as well as the actual sin which is in us all. "Primitiveness, violence, cruelty, in short all the powers of darkness." "The Shadow" is the result of original sin.

If we succeed in banishing our evil side and become unaware of it, the primitive cruelty and wickedness in our hearts waxes stronger and stronger out of sight. The beast is preparing for battle in secret. It is crouching just below the thin surface of consciousness, with talons out, ready to break through and destroy.

The danger is great when we are not in conscious conflict with ourselves. We must bring the evil out into the light of consciousness, in order that we may meet it on the battlefield of our own souls.

We are safe only when we are consciously at war within ourselves. This is one meaning that we may discover in those paradoxical words of the Prince of Peace, "I bring not peace but a sword." But the danger is not to the individual alone. When a great many individuals are secretly possessed by forces which they do not understand, they are drawn together and united in a curious way by the forces they disavow.

There is a mysterious magnetism which unites them, and if they are organized into a group which identifies itself with an ideal that replaces the individual's sense of responsibility and his sense of his own littleness by an inflated idea of the mission and power of the group, he becomes more and more unaware of the evil in himself.

When this happens, that evil is multiplied; it is no longer one man's "shadow," but the shadow of millions, all uncontested, all gathering force, ready to be released as soon as a leader is found who is possessed by so great a power that he is the symbol and personification of the masses.

As the devil driven out of the maniac was liberated in the Gadarene swine and sent them rushing to their destruction, the devil that has been liberated from the leader's soul seizes upon and liberates "the Shadow" in the souls of the regimented multitude and drives them to their own ultimate destruction.

We have seen this illustrated in the tragedy of Germany. German youth, smarting under the humiliation following the war of 1914—demoralized and depressed—was a ready prey to the Nazi ideology. Lost in the new exhilaration, identified to the point of insanity with the rightness of the Cause and the idolatry of the Fuehrer, not one of those young men and women was aware of the evil within themselves.

As the blonde Hans, with the blue eyes and face of an angel and the slight smell of carbolic soap, swung along the streets in his S.S. uniform, exulting in the sacrifice of his personality to the Cause, the forgotten evil in his own soul, uncontested, waxed stronger and more furious. Straining at the chains that were already breaking, crouching in the darkness, the beast was ready to spring.

But the beast was not alone. The multitudinous evil in the millions was secretly united in an immeasurable force of destruction, waiting for the signal to break out into the open and plunge the world into a sea of blood.

The signal came from Hitler, because he was the most inferior and most irresponsible of them all. He was not the leader or the oppressor of the German people, but the expression of everything that was worst in them, which they were repressing in themselves. This is Jung's description of Hitler and his relationship to his people:

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> "With the rest of the world they did not understand what Hitler's significance was: namely, that he was a symbol, and that he was the most prodigious personification of all human inferiorities. He was a highly incapable, unadapted, irresponsible, psychopathic individual, full of empty childish fantasies, but cursed with the keen intuition of a rat or guttersnipe. He represented the shadow, the inferior part of everybody's personality, in an overwhelming degree—and this is another reason why they fell for him."
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> -C. G. JUNG, *THE FIGHT WITH THE SHADOW*

It was that intuition of the "rat or gutternsipe" that warned Hitler that the wild beasts leashed in the darkness were already too thirsty for blood to be held back until the moment for the devastation of Europe, and impelled him to let them loose upon the Jews in Germany.

What happened to the Germans yesterday may happen to us tomorrow. We are creating conditions such as the Germans made for themselves.

First of all and most dangerous of all, we too repudiate "the Shadow"; we refuse to see that in each one of us, just below the brittle surface of consciousness, there is a "Beast of Belsen." We prefer to think that those who committed outrages of cruelty on human beings in Belsen, Auschwitz, Lublin, Mauthausen and Ravensbrück were abnormal people, monsters suffering from some congenital psychopathic enormity; but this is not so. The most revealing finding at the trials of the "war criminals" was that they were, with very few exceptions, sane, normal people, people like you and me.

They did what we are doing; instead of fighting the evil in themselves and so preventing the collective force of evil from gathering, they escaped into the complacency and the false security of identification with a group—not that rightful tendency to associate with others, grounded in man's nature as a social being, whereby the individual personality is enriched, but a fleeing from the burden of being oneself.

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Right through every stratum of society this tendency prevails here. Men and women hand themselves over willingly to be crowded together and controlled by forces outside themselves in industry; they lose sight of their helplessness before the rising tide of want and poverty. They even allow their pleasure to be organized for them, and herd together in huge groups to spend their holidays in camps, where every hour of the day is arranged for them.

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Thus by losing his individuality, in order to rid himself of his first responsibility—namely, to fight the evil in himself—man adds a sinister aspect to personal guilt, not only for the individual concerned, but for mankind as a whole.

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Paul Nowak

Paul Nowak is a husband and father of 7, who also happens to be a writer and author. He has written *The Way of the Christian Samurai* among other books.

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